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BROKEN

CAN WE CHOOSE WHO
WE LOVE?

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FICTION

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Broken

With her eyes welling up as I looked at her sad face, I could see her heartbreaking. The news was devastating for us. I wanted to comfort her with a hug or some affection,
but she wouldn't have any of that. An affair is one of those things that broke a relationship, I thought to myself. Tore down to its bare skeletal structure and exposed it for what it had been and now, sadly, for what it had become.

An affair was a strange relationship, I thought to myself, as I tried to make sense of the situation. One moment you're in a fantastic relationship and the very next moment something changes. Something you like but now appears missing in your partner. You start looking for it again, but it isn't there. Next thing you know, you find it in someone else and with a wink, a smile or a glint in their eye, it starts. That new person fills the void and offers you that new excitement you no longer feel in your current relationship. That's how it starts.

"We could forget what's happened and just make like it never happened" I pleaded with her. How was it possible to love someone so much but also feel love for someone else at the same time? To devote yourself to someone and want to spend the rest of your life with them but then in what seems like another life, having a relationship with another person is such a similar but unfamiliar way. I guess it is possible because it has just happened.

With the warmth of love for your partner in one life and the excitement of an affair in another life, this was how it was, life one

and life two.

Life One

Lying next to each other, I wake first. Looking down at the way the sheets lay on her body, showing those curves that highlight beneath the sheets, her beautiful, perfect body. Her silk-like hair is laying on the pillow as she sleeps. I can hear her breathing ever so quietly. Quietly enough so that she does not disturb her surroundings. Quietly enough so that the sheets raise and lower with every breath she takes.

I leave the room and shower,
and as I walk into the kitchen for breakfast before work, she is drinking a glass of orange juice near the kitchen bench, as I sit down. There is nothing this woman does from sleeping to drinking orange juice; that doesn't make me admire her on many levels. She is to me perfect, and no matter what happens in life two, she always will be.

Once we have taken the train to work, we part at the station. I go downtown to my office in a high-rise and commence my day. She works uptown as an IT specialist for one of the largest companies in the country. Sometimes if we both can make it, we have lunch together. More recently, this has become the exception rather than the rule. I suspect the reason is that of life two, but that is to be expected.

Our working day ended, we would meet up and catch the train home together. But of course, this was dependent on two things. Either of us doesn't have to work back late and sometimes life two came into play.

We were quite active people, and we were always walking our dog Chipper, joining a fun run or going out of town to one of the many national parks for a day trip. We loved climbing the small

cliff edges or walking along the many mountain trails and recently we had started mountain bike riding. Her idea, but I soon learnt to love it. “change is as good as a holiday”, she would remind me. Going from walking the dog to mountain bike riding was a change of pace. I guess in a way; life two was a
change as well.

The biggest change in my life, until now, was the day we were married. I had stood at the altar with her, and we both said our vows. I remember them well and from time to time when I would look at another woman with their curves and cute smiles directed towards me, I would have to catch myself and the guilt of that moment would play on me for a few short minutes while I remembered my wife. “How could I think this way when I am happily married”, I would say to myself, and oops, back to reality I would land and feel happy with my life. So what are vows? Just words we say at the time, which we mean at the time but like all things we expect, say or do, time passes
and as I have learnt through this ordeal, so apparently do our words.

If I could just get her to understand, to forget the affair ever happened. The glimpse, the flirting and then the love affair. If I could just get her to forget it and put it all behind us, then we might have one last chance at happiness. One last chance of me waking up next to her knowing that she was the most important thing in my life. She was my life but convincing her of that would take time. For now, I would just have to be there, be there and suffer the pain of watching her eyes welling up as I looked at her sad face, I could see her heartbreaking as I pleaded with her to forget it er happened.

Life Two

With the pretence of working back late, the affair would start at a hotel on the other side of town. The room rates were cheap, so not to be noticed as a small charge on our bank statement. Well I looked at our bank account, and the hotel charges were all mixed up with the direct debits and fund transfers, so very cleverly, not noticed.

An affair is not like in the movies as I had thought. It was sneaky and underhanded. Keeping the third party completely oblivious and thinking everything was as routine as the previous day and then the day that followed. While normality pursued, the apparent gaps were the times when the two lovers met and go most importantly, unobserved. If done with just the right amount of deceit, the cunning of a rat and the timing of relative at a will reading, the affair could be and was undetected, until now.

Meeting with her at the hotel was like a sort of collaboration of deceit. Both parties knew it was wrong, but in support of each other, the affair carried on regardless. Without the concern for the pain caused by even the slightest revelation of the affair, it carried on for almost two years. Meeting at the hotel, meeting in a park nobody we knew visited, the business trips away; they were all key to the success of the affair. Until now these seemingly innocently portrayed absences were afforded way too much trust when compared to what had happened.

Standing in the hotel room, unzipping her dress and watching as it slipped down her almost perfect body, to the floor. Embracing her and falling onto the bed and being enthralled in the passion of the affair. With the lie of the “business trip”, lying next to her after making love and then falling asleep together in each other’s arms. In the morning, waking up next to her and looking down at the way the sheets lay on her body, showing those curves that highlight

beneath the sheets, her beautiful, perfect body. Her silk-like hair laying on the pillow as she sleeps, watching her breath ever so quietly. Quietly enough so that she does not disturb her surroundings. Quietly
enough so that the sheets raise and lower with every breath she takes. Returning home, the next night after the “business trip”, as if nothing untoward had ever happened. No broken trust, no broken vows, no played out deceit. There was nothing but normality, yet it was all a lie. A lie, however, I could live with easily. A lie that
we could have easily never told another soul. A secret lie. Our secret lie.

With her eyes welling up as I looked at her sad face. She started to cry as she looked back at me and said, “I should have never betrayed you, I love you, please please forgive me”.

About the author

William Dirk Mayberry is an Australian writer and independent digital publisher based in West Java, Indonesia. Writing across fiction, memoir, essays, educational works, self-help, and reflective nonfiction, his work explores memory, resilience, observation, and everyday human experience through a direct and personal style. His interest in storytelling began during his service in the Royal Australian Navy and later developed into a growing catalogue of independently published digital works released under the Java Free Press imprint. His publications include memoirs such as The Longest Way Home, children's stories from the Bag Chip Bird series, practical educational titles from the 101 Self Help collection, and speculative fiction projects including the Crononaught Collection. Influenced by writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson, his work combines realism, introspection, and accessible storytelling across a range of genres and formats.

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